United Nations A/60/PV.52

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

52nd plenary meeting
Monday, 14 November 2005, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 73 *(continued)*

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/60/86, A/60/87, A/60/89, A/60/227, A/60/302, A/60/432)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/443)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.19)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/90)

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): Recent humanitarian emergencies have demonstrated the overall capability of the humanitarian community to launch a massive response when called upon. However, it is quite obvious that the quality of response needs improvement. Humanitarian response does not always meet the basic needs of affected populations in a timely way. It varies considerably from crisis to crisis, and current capacity levels are not always sufficient to meet the demands of major emergencies occurring at the same time. While some of the factors affecting the response are specific to individual crises, some of the key challenges seem to be systemic in nature.

The Humanitarian Response Review has therefore highlighted a number of well-known and long-standing gaps that the international humanitarian system has failed to address so far, in particular the low level of preparedness of the humanitarian organizations in terms of human resources and sectoral capacity. Furthermore, the way in which humanitarian crisis response is funded affects the system's ability to react promptly, effectively and in a principled and impartial manner.

Azerbaijan supports efforts to reform the existing humanitarian response system. We share the view that predictable humanitarian funding is one of the key elements of the reform package. In this context, the idea of upgrading the current Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) through the addition of a grant element is of particular importance for ensuring timely and effective response both in cases of newly emerging crises and in under-funded and protracted crises.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

05-61200 (E)

With regard to the latter, it is worth mentioning that even the overall increase in global humanitarian funding has not ensured an equitable humanitarian response in all parts of the globe, and funding continues to be concentrated on high-profile crises that enjoy significant political and media attention. Therefore, the idea of allocating one third of the upgraded CERF's grant facilities for under-funded emergencies is commendable. We believe, however, that clear and objective eligibility criteria based on needs assessment must be elaborated in order to ensure the equitable and balanced funding of such emergencies. The disbursement of the Fund should take into account the existing imbalance in spending among regions, as well as among sectors.

As far as humanitarian coordination is concerned, the effective coordination of the humanitarian response at the field level is of paramount importance. In our view, close cooperation and effective coordination among all stakeholders is crucial for ensuring the efficiency of the United Nations system-wide capacity and of short- and medium-term relief efforts. In this regard, strengthening support for, and the capacities of, the resident humanitarian coordinators and United Nations country teams is critical.

It is clear that national ownership in the design, implementation and coordination of programmes in both post-disaster and post-conflict situations is essential in order to ensure the desired impact of those programmes and their sustainability. However, efficient burden-sharing between national authorities and international humanitarian and development actors is needed, in particular in protracted humanitarian situations with mass displacement and limited national capacities to tackle all existing problems.

Better coordination by the United Nations of international efforts on the ground is needed in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and to increase the efficiency of activities overall in situations such as those to which I have referred. Humanitarian assistance and funding should not be limited to providing immediate response to crises, but should also take into account long-term needs in the transition phase. Capacity gaps in the United Nations coordination mechanisms in the transition phase must be adequately addressed so as to ensure an efficient response to transition needs.

Furthermore, the effective planning of activities in post-disaster and post-conflict transitions must be improved. Regular monitoring and assessment of needs could contribute to the consistent planning of the work of various stakeholders.

We note with concern the situation with regard to internally displaced persons, the number of whom has increased all over the world. Despite a considerable international response, an alarmingly high number of internally displaced persons do not receive sufficient protection and assistance. There is a strong need for concerted action by the international community. There is no doubt that protecting and assisting internally displaced persons is particularly important in stabilizing affected countries, restoring economic and social life and paving the way for development.

The situation of internally displaced persons is an area with regard to which United Nations agencies must strengthen their cooperation and revitalize their collaborative actions in order to address the existing gaps in the international response to the issue. United Nations entities should employ mechanisms that establish a comprehensive and clear division of responsibilities for system-wide action. In this regard, we welcome the fact that the United Nations system has begun to pay due attention to the problem of internal displacement by reflecting on the matter of further strengthening the inter-agency response to the needs and protection-associated challenges of internally displaced persons.

I would like now to turn to sub-item (c) of agenda item 73, "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". Azerbaijan attaches great importance to these deliberations. We commend the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/60/443 and express our appreciation to the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine for their valuable input. The report provides a useful overview of the current situation and an impact analysis of activities for the long-term development of the Chernobyl-affected areas.

In the year leading up to the twentieth anniversary, the observation that the region has not recovered the livelihoods that were lost and that the ramifications of the disaster still represent a serious challenge to the economic, social and environmental

development of the most-affected countries causes particular concern. Clearly, the maturity of the problem makes it imperative that we reinforce international efforts to overcome the consequences, but on no account should it be viewed as an old or forgotten problem.

Efficient post-disaster recovery and development require the targeted assistance of the international community and synergy among the stakeholders. Thus, we note with satisfaction that the comprehensive framework actions put in place in the most affected countries have been complemented and coordinated at both governmental and system-wide levels.

We welcome the positive change in the system-wide response for Chernobyl recovery efforts, and we look forward to the further coherent and effective engagement of the organizations of the United Nations system, bearing in mind their mandates and comparative advantages. Azerbaijan also values the role of the United Nations Development Group in coordinating these efforts and further maintaining the shift to a long-term development approach.

We also hail the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, both as the lead organizer of the Chernobyl Forum and as a purveyor of technical cooperation programmes for reducing the radiological impact of the accident and addressing its human dimension.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the fact that Azerbaijan believes that the current review will give new impetus to reinforcing international cooperation in the areas of economic development and scientific research on the environmental and health consequences of the disaster, and will increase the efficiency of preparations for the commemorative year 2006.

Azerbaijan, as a sponsor of the important draft resolutions before us under this agenda item — A/60/L.18, L.19 and L.20 — expresses its hope that through their implementation, we will succeed in addressing our concerns with regard to the strengthening of mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and respond to humanitarian emergencies worldwide.

Mr. Oosthuizen (South Africa): I should like first of all to align my delegation with the statements made by the Ambassador of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the Permanent Representative of Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, as well as to thank the Secretary-General for his reports prepared under this item.

The past year was indeed very challenging for the humanitarian community. We were faced with many hurricanes, floods and earthquakes all over the world. We remember in particular the recent devastating earthquake in Pakistan, emphasizing the point made by the Secretary-General in his report (*A/60/432*) that the need for effective humanitarian assistance has increased dramatically.

In his earlier report, "In larger freedom", (*A/59/2005*) the Secretary-General recognized that the humanitarian system has generally worked well in most emergencies, given the means at its disposal. That would imply, at least to us, that the United Nations system has tried its best, given the limited resources it has received. Let me provide some examples of what I understand is meant by the phrase, "the means at its disposal", particularly having the African continent in mind.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) highlighted, for example, during its United Nations Humanitarian Appeal 2005, that funding obtained amounted to only 36 per cent of overall requirements, if the Indian Ocean Flash Appeal, launched at the beginning of the year to address the effects of the tsunami disaster, is excluded.

More troubling for the African continent was the sober analysis that the Djibouti Drought Flash Appeal attracted only 5 per cent of the required $7.5 million and the Benin Flash Appeal only 9 per cent of the required $4.6 million. As recently as the first week of September 2005, the World Food Programme expressed concern that it might not obtain enough funding to address the food shortage in Mozambique, which only required $19 million to avert the crisis.

We are now receiving reports of the severe impact of the drought in Malawi, which would also necessitate further consideration for assistance. What is particularly troubling about the African example is that even when appeals are made in advance to address crises, they still do not get the desired response. The further tragedy of this is that a rapid response to these crises could have mitigated the effects of the disasters.

It is therefore obvious that we need to rethink the way we provide funding to address international humanitarian responses, not only with regard to the amount of funding, but also the unequal way in which funding is being distributed. The recently adopted outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) clearly indicated our consensus agreement that the effectiveness of the humanitarian response system could in part be enhanced by improving the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF).

In the interest of time, allow me to make a few specific comments on the proposals in the Secretary-General's report before us. We support the modernization of the current CERF so that it can respond rapidly to emergencies, particularly forgotten or underfunded emergencies, many of which are in Africa.

Our support for timely response to identified needs is based on real experiences in Africa. One recent example is the locust crisis in the Sahel. Although the initial requests for support were modest in dollar terms, immediate action could have prevented the hunger and starvation that followed the scourge of locusts. The lack of an effective and immediate response often leads to the so-called forgotten or neglected emergencies, which, as I have already indicated, are often in Africa. The proposal by the Secretary-General to attend to those neglected emergencies, through the new Central Emergency Response Fund, is therefore strongly supported.

We recognize the value of upgrading the CERF and providing it more financial support, especially through the addition of a grant facility. We would also support operationalizing the Fund as soon as possible, reminding ourselves that humanitarian response is indeed supposed to be immediate in order to address the most basic humanitarian needs of affected communities. However, in line with the appeal made by the Secretary-General, we would request that donors, in announcing their support for the new CERF, emphasize that that support would be additional funding; it should not be funds redirected from other development budgets.

It is obvious that we need to further support capacity-building within OCHA if we want to strengthen the humanitarian response of the United Nations system. We would also like to see the further development of the Financial Tracking System to better reflect and monitor humanitarian financing. That would provide Member States with a better understanding of what has been promised and what has been delivered.

We recognize that addressing and improving the response of the international community to humanitarian crises is not simply a matter of financing alone. We also need to look at issues such as leadership and response capacity, and at how to effectively identify and respond to needs. Of particular importance is improving and strengthening the leadership and performance of the resident coordinators and/or the humanitarian coordinators. We also need to be clear about the role envisaged for the United Nations operational agencies and the issue of governance and accountability within the United Nations system, as well as better coordination, not only within the United Nations system but also between that system and non-governmental organizations.

We need to ensure that the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance are adhered to, particularly the notion that humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. However, it is my opinion that the proposals on the table to improve the CERF are a step in the right direction, and we need to seriously engage in that debate. We would also like to see the humanitarian community continue to draw on the national expertise of countries in order to increase their rapid-response capacity.

We have noticed with appreciation that in the past the Secretary-General has recognized the role that regional organizations, particularly the African Union, could and should play in addressing humanitarian crises in the context of improved partnerships.

My delegation remains ready to participate actively in the debate in the coming days to further discuss the ways and means to strengthen humanitarian coordination and response capacity, for we realize that many issues are complicated and would need detailed attention. My delegation would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Jan Egeland, and his team for the proposals made and for maintaining a focus on the need to improve humanitarian assistance to affected communities, many of which are in developing countries.

Finally, I would like to express my Government's sincere appreciation to all humanitarian personnel,

working often under very difficult situations to help people in need.

Mr. Holosha (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Ukraine aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union on the issue of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance.

We would like to devote our statement to sub-item (c) of agenda item 73, "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

First, allow me to express our sincere condolences and support to the Governments and people of countries that have suffered natural and humanitarian disasters this year. Such tragedies always find a response in the hearts of my compatriots, because, almost 20 years ago in Ukraine, at the fourth plant of the Chernobyl nuclear power station, there was a technological catastrophe, enormous both in its scale and its consequences. That national tragedy doomed millions of people to suffering, altered the environment and even affected people psychologically.

The accident showed how vulnerable States are when faced with global technological catastrophes in peacetime. More than 10 per cent of our country's territory was exposed to radioactive contamination. Some 160,000 people from 170 towns had to leave their homes forever and move to other areas. A total of 3.5 million people in Ukraine suffered from the catastrophe and its consequences, particularly those in rural areas.

The lack of specialized knowledge about radioactivity prevented people from evaluating for themselves the truth of information provided by the press and the electronic mass media. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the worsening environmental situation led to a situation in which the accident at the nuclear power plant constituted a catastrophe for millions of people living in contaminated areas. In an instant, hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens became the victims of the consequences of Chernobyl. Fate and history have dictated that our nation, Ukraine, must pay bills which it never signed for and atone for sins that it did not commit. We have to deploy major material and financial resources to call for the affected people, deal with the consequences of the catastrophe in the evacuated areas and rehabilitate the environment.

Over the last 15 years, during which Ukraine, on its own, has been covering the costs of responding to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the expenditures, representing from five to 10 per cent of our national budget, have not been decreasing. The expenses associated with dealing with the consequences of the disaster over those years represent about $8 billion. Overall, the economic losses associated with the Chernobyl accident represent some $180 billion. This is nine times the national budget of Ukraine for the year 2005.

It should be said that for Ukraine dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster has differed significantly from the experience of other affected countries. This is due to the fact that the Chernobyl plant is located in Ukraine, as is the so-called "shelter" facility, which for 19 years has served as a protective system covering the epicentre of the disaster.

In 1994, the international community, in the form of the leaders of the Group of Eight (G-8) and the European Union, presented the Government of Ukraine with a proposal to shut down the Chernobyl nuclear power plant ahead of schedule. In 1995, a memorandum of understanding was signed in which Ukraine undertook to close the plant early. In the memorandum, the parties recognized that the complete closure of the Chernobyl power station would have negative economic consequences for Ukraine. Though it meant sacrificing its national interest to some degree, Ukraine met its international obligations, and in 2000 the plant was closed down, although we were not prepared for this, either technologically or financially. There was no project for decommissioning the Chernobyl plant, although by law such a project should have been approved five years in advance of the plant closure. Financial support for decommissioning was also lacking. Because of this, and according to the joint plan of action between Ukraine and the G-8, it was proposed that closure of the Chernobyl power station be supported through grants that would enable Ukraine to implement a number of international plans aimed at increasing safety.

Currently at the Chernobyl industrial site four major projects are being implemented. They differ as to size, projected completion dates and funding sources. In addition to Ukraine, the donors for this

project include, more or less, all of the world's developed countries. However, and this cannot but be a source of some alarm, there have been delays in implementing these projects, ranging from one to six years. The longest delay has occurred in a project that is central to the decommissioning of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, namely, the construction of a second depleted nuclear fuel storage facility.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond Ukraine's control, work on this project has ground to a halt. As a consequence, five years after the plant has been decommissioned, fuel remains in the reactors. We now need to take decisions to offload the spent fuel into temporary storage plants that will not be serviceable for much longer. And another important point: the most important international project referred to in the memorandum between Ukraine and the G-7, that of converting the shelter system into an environmentally safe system, is also several years behind schedule. To ensure the successful implementation of these international projects, we need additional joint resources from donor countries to finance this project, as well as contractors to complete this project.

The Chernobyl disaster altered people's lives in social, economic and medical terms, and also had an impact on their inner lives. The problems that it engendered have not disappeared with the passage of years, but are assuming different forms. Some of these, particularly the social and economic effects, are worsening. Therefore, Ukraine believes that there needs to be an integrated solution to these problems and that there must be a systematic approach on the part of the executive branch in setting up socioeconomic and organizational conditions, as well as in providing guarantees of social services for the affected population and rehabilitating the contaminated areas.

While we hope for assistance in addressing these problems, Ukraine is itself doing everything it can to respond to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. We have adopted many forward-looking decisions, the most important of which is a national programme to respond to the consequences of the disaster between now and 2010. This programme defines the priorities of the Government's policy to respond to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster over the next five years. The main objectives include protecting the health of victims, particularly women and children, decommissioning the Chernobyl nuclear power station and converting the shelter into an environmentally safe system, strengthening and supporting radiation safety barriers and cutting back on the release of radionucleides into the area beyond the exclusion zone, social support to the people and economic rehabilitation of the contaminated areas.

On the basis of experience gained over many years and also pursuant to the recommendations of the Vienna Chernobyl Forum in 2005, the main target groups for medical supervision over the next 10 years will be those who took part in disaster response, people who were exposed to significant doses of iodine radiation as children and victims who have remained in areas contaminated with radionucleides. The social support policy gives particular attention to implementing State programmes to rehabilitate the contaminated area and to making sure that they are made clean and attract investment, as well as to developing infrastructure and creating jobs in places where victims make up a large proportion of the population.

We are pleased to note that the key principles in the rehabilitation strategy prepared by the United Nations are in line with the above-mentioned priorities of the Government of Ukraine. And here, we hope that there will be greater cooperation with the United Nations structures and with donor countries in implementing projects, such as improved delivery of primary health care services and improved medical aid, particularly for women and children, carrying out projects to ensure social and economic rehabilitation of the affected areas, transitioning these areas into a phase of social and economic development, completing the international projects for decommissioning the Chernobyl power plant, and transforming the shelter system into an environmentally safe system.

Thanks to the joint efforts of Ukraine and the international community, in particular, the United Nations, we have been able to deal with many critical problems associated with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. However, many problems remain. And here it would be appropriate to refer to the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who said, "Chernobyl is a word we would all like to erase from our memory ... more than 7 million of our fellow human beings do not have the luxury of forgetting. They are still suffering, every day, as a result of what happened."

As the country and people who have suffered most from the Chernobyl disaster and its long-term consequences, we are entitled to count on the support of the international community. This support should come both in the form of international assistance programmes, which are vital, and in the form of simple human understanding and compassion for our problems.

The 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster falls on 26 April 2006, and in connection with this tragic event, from 24 to 26 April 2006, in Kyiv, we will hold an international conference entitled "Twenty Years After the Chernobyl Disaster: Future Outlook." The conference will sum up what has already been done, draw up a programme of action, both for the international community and for national organizations engaged in responding to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, and assess the impact of the catastrophe on the nuclear power industry as a whole. We invite Member States as well as all interested partners to take part in the conference. We also feel compelled to ask the President of the General Assembly to convene in late April and early May of 2006 a special meeting of the General Assembly devoted to this tragic anniversary. We believe this will provide additional momentum for the adoption of effective measures to step up collaboration in the international community to continue responding to the after-effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The delegation of Ukraine, as a sponsor of the draft resolution on Chernobyl at this session of the General Assembly, attaches particular importance to its being adopted by consensus. We are convinced that this document will serve to increase international cooperation on Chernobyl issues.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 on all sub-items under agenda item 73.

It is an unfortunate reality that within just one year two natural disasters of unprecedented magnitude struck the region of South Asia. One hit from land; the other came from the sea. On 26 December 2004, tidal waves struck two thirds of Sri Lanka's coastal areas, leaving in their wake death and destruction of a scale hitherto unknown in our 2,500-year recorded history. Friendly Governments, the United Nations, international organizations, civil society and countless well-wishers across the world reached out beyond the confines of geopolitical and other man-made barriers to help. This boundless generosity rekindled in us a new confidence in the power of people acting in unison for the welfare of humankind. To all those who sympathized with us and assisted in rescue and relief operations, the people of Sri Lanka are profoundly grateful.

Let me also take this opportunity to extend a special word of thanks to President Clinton, the United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, for his commitment and leadership in coordinating the ongoing international effort for our sustainable recovery from the tsunami disaster.

In the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, there was no strong institutional framework to coordinate the relief effort, owing to the lack of credible local disaster management and mitigation procedures. However, the latent capacities of the existing district administration and local civil society structures came to the fore. Even with inadequate capacity and lack of experience, they responded magnificently. The fact that there were no deaths in Sri Lanka from starvation or ill health as a result of the disaster is a credit to the immediate local input.

It has become evident that building local capacity and ownership are essential for the success of long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. This requires a partnership with the locality and an understanding of specific local conditions, as well as projects that will be ultimately be owned by the people in the affected areas. In this context, Sri Lanka has now developed a blueprint for reconstruction, in cooperation and consultation with the United Nations system, the international donor community and numerous civil society organizations. Most importantly, given the importance of multi-stakeholder participation for sustainable recovery, this blueprint reflects the general will of the people in each affected locality as well. System-wide consultations take place on a continual basis that provide the scope and opportunity for beneficiary inputs to the reconstruction programme.

Natural disasters create huge setbacks, thus negating development gains for developing countries. As we approach the first anniversary of the tsunami disaster, Sri Lanka is engaged in an inevitably long and complex reconstruction process. It has been estimated that $1.8 billion will be required for reconstruction.

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to building back better. We are pleased that Sri Lanka's economy is projected to resume its growth this year, as the infrastructure damaged by the tsunami is being rebuilt, and the fisheries and tourism sectors of the economy are beginning to recover. We are also on course to meet the construction target of 80 per cent of the 80,000 houses that had been destroyed.

Since the initial stages of the recovery effort, Sri Lanka has been committed to effective management of the recovery effort, as well as to transparency and accountability in the disbursement of funds. In this connection, the United Nations has worked with us to create a development assistance database system, which enables the Government to coordinate reconstruction efforts more effectively and identify gaps in the process. It also enables the public to view financial data and track progress in the activities of donors and implementing partners. In our view, this is a model worthy of emulation in similar situations.

Natural disasters can strike anywhere, as we have witnessed in the recent past. Unfortunately, it is apparent that the rate of survival and the ability to rebuild depends on the relative wealth of the affected country. Therefore, there are several important steps that our development partners can take to help developing countries affected by disasters to attain sustainable recovery.

Given that many developing countries have opened up their economies on the basis that more trade, not aid, will engender economic development, trade barriers that exist in various forms in our export markets can be a drag on our recovery and growth. Therefore, market access for our exports, preferably under concessionary terms, at least for a specific period, would accelerate the recovery process. Moreover, excessive debt burdens continue to be a great hindrance to our recovery potential, especially in the light of escalating oil prices and the depression in commodity prices. To give an example, before the tsunami disaster Sri Lanka had set aside $500 million for servicing debt for the year, an amount we can ill afford now in the face of massive reconstruction expenditure. We are grateful to several countries for cancelling some of our debt and for offers of moratoriums on repayment of debts. However, we do need for such humanitarian gestures to continue until the recovery is completed.

The experiences of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, of hurricanes that struck the Caribbean, Hurricane Katrina, landslides in Guatemala and Mexico, as well as the South Asian earthquake just last month, make apparent the need to develop effective and efficient disaster management and risk reduction at the regional and global levels. This week the leaders of South Asia underscored this fact at their summit meeting in Bangladesh. In this respect, initiatives for setting up global early warning systems, incorporating regional, subregional and national systems, should receive higher priority. Hence, we seek the support of all concerned parties to establish the proposed Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system by January 2006, as scheduled.

The recent increase in natural disasters has also met with the unfortunate situation of uneven funding patterns and donor interest. This glaring disparity in resource availability for each disaster may be a result of several factors, including donor fatigue. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of each Member State of the United Nations to empower this Organization in such a manner as to even out those odds to the extent possible in view of our common humanitarian concerns. This will, no doubt, enable the United Nations system to mobilize on short notice. Whenever a natural disaster occurs, anywhere in the world, the United Nations should not be made to wait for funds in order to commence work immediately. In this context, Sri Lanka supports the proposal to upgrade the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which is expected to be operational by January 2006, with a renewed funding base. However, for the Fund to succeed over the long term, it is essential to have standing pledges for its replenishment. Moreover, the involvement of both traditional and non-traditional donors, as well as the experience of countries affected by natural disaster, in the governance of the Fund will play an important role in its success.

We profoundly appreciate the way in which the United Nations system marshalled its energy and resources to alleviate the misery of those affected by the tsunami disaster. In that regard, we emphasize once again the important role of the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian relief assistance throughout the world for all natural disasters.

Having recently faced such a natural disaster, we note some important factors that, in our view, make the delivery of assistance cost-effective and efficient.

First, duplication must be avoided, both within the United Nations system and with regard to assistance from civil society and non-governmental organizations. It would be best if the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs would work with national Governments and all other donors and stakeholders to that end.

Secondly, we must promote substantive and substantial national and local involvement in all relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts. Such efforts must encompass not only national Government authorities but also national civil society organizations.

Thirdly, locally available resources, in particular human resources, must be utilized. That substantially decreases the overhead costs usually associated with United Nations operations and international donor programmes. Furthermore, the use of local raw materials and local processing can be cost-effective and engender sustainable development.

Fourthly, transparency should be promoted in action taken at the international level and, more importantly, at the local level. That necessarily includes disclosure as to financial outlays and how donor funds have been utilized at the local level.

Given the current rapid advancements in technology and human capabilities and the exponential accumulation of wealth in some parts of the world, it is unconscionable to let less fortunate fellow human beings suffer through neglect and apathy. The rapid globalization of both economic and social forces can no longer bear such iniquity. It is in our enlightened self-interest to work in partnership to provide rescue and relief to all human beings, wherever they live and whenever such needs arise. We need to continue to learn from every disaster how we can improve our methods of delivery and mobilize the conscience of humanity for the noble goal of helping one another. To that end, the Organization has a unique role to fulfil. And we, as Member States, must empower the Organization with appropriate means and resources. We cannot fail.

Mrs. Asmady (Indonesia): The Indonesian delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports on humanitarian assistance, which have made clear the urgent need for change in the approach for dealing with disasters and complex emergencies. We once again express our deep appreciation to Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and his team for their commitment to their role of coordinating the efforts of the United Nations system, and in particular for their contributions during the emergency relief phase in countries affected by the December 2004 tsunami.

In making its contribution to the discussion on the subject, Indonesia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the statement made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Because of ongoing conflicts and natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and severe weather patterns that cause extensive damage for vulnerable populations in various parts of the world, the demand for humanitarian assistance continues to escalate. The situation is compounded by the increase of worldwide epidemics such as the avian flu.

Indonesia shares the view that the United Nations must take steps to strengthen its current system, tools and competencies in order to effectively address current and future humanitarian needs. The United Nations needs increased resources and better coordination of its efforts, so that its response time to future disasters is shortened by making the necessary funding and appropriately trained personnel readily available.

As part of that change and in order to ensure better coordination and avoid the duplication of programmes on the ground, it is essential to strengthen the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and other relevant bodies that intervene in the humanitarian emergency phase and are involved in follow-up rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. There must also be constant awareness that there are humanitarian needs that extend well beyond the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phase and which early humanitarian arrangements do not cover. In general, early transition activities tend to focus on stabilizing and re-establishing basic State infrastructure before full needs assessments can be completed.

Along with those changes aimed at responding to the full range of real needs on the ground, action must be taken to address the persistent financial constraints that affect humanitarian work. My delegation therefore fully supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General to convert the Central Emergency Revolving Fund into an emergency response fund with a grant facility. That would ensure immediate funding to support rapid responses to humanitarian crises. We must give that proposal urgent consideration.

Indonesia also welcomes the commitment of world leaders at last September's summit to address the aforementioned challenges in humanitarian assistance, in particular to strengthen the capacities of developing countries to respond rapidly to natural disasters and mitigate their impact. It is to the credit of our leaders that they took the decision to further develop and improve mechanisms that equip developing countries with emergency standby capacities.

With respect to the specific case of those developing countries affected by the December 2004 tsunami, Indonesia notes that President William Jefferson Clinton has been appointed to sustain the political will of the international community to support long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction in countries impacted by the tsunami. Similar initiatives should be taken in the future when unprecedented global catastrophes occur.

Being one of the countries that suffered the wrath of the December 2004 tsunami in the worst possible way, Indonesia remains deeply grateful for the generous contributions and the solidarity extended by the international community. For its part, Indonesia has undertaken, and will persist in, its efforts to ensure that such contributions are managed in a fully transparent and accountable fashion.

To that end, Indonesia has adopted a master plan for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh and Nias Island. The plan provides a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach to a five-year restoration and reconstruction programme for the worst-hit regions. The plan provides guidelines for: creating understanding and building commitment among all stakeholders; coordinating, synchronizing and integrating the plans of various sectors; disseminating and distributing data and information to the local, national and international communities; promoting the solidarity, participation and involvement of civil society; and designing a system and mechanism for the mobilization of funds.

The fruit of the plan was the establishment on 29 April 2005 of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency. Its main mission is to restore livelihoods and strengthen communities in Aceh and Nias by designing and overseeing a coordinated, community-driven reconstruction and development programme, implemented in accordance with the highest professional standards.

Although progress is under way, my delegation has come to appreciate how certain aspects of this process can affect the pace of the implementation of the overall programme. Coordination is one such aspect. It must be implemented to guarantee that all affected communities are properly assisted, in accordance with their specified needs and priorities, by agencies in the field. If that is to be done successfully, community leadership must be consulted and must form part of the recovery effort planning process. However, because various agencies have widely divergent approaches, standards and speeds of operation, recovery work can be slowed by serious disorganization.

Another important aspect of implementation is community participation. The fact that that entails painstaking consultations with community leaders to determine what must be done and how to prioritize projects so that efforts can be properly sequenced has created the false impression of slow progress. Once consultations have been completed, however, it is expected that the actual rehabilitation and reconstruction work will be carried out with speed and efficiency.

The value of this participatory approach also brings home the fact that it is critically important that vulnerable countries develop regional and national capacities to anticipate major natural disasters by using early warning systems and to mobilize domestic resources to lessen the humanitarian impact. Since national resources are available when disasters strike, they represent the first line of defence against a rapid deterioration of the situation in an affected community.

In addition, such resources constitute a vital aspect of a disaster-prone country's preparedness and its ability to help itself. Appropriate training must therefore be provided to potential first responders, including civilian, military and other security forces

that can act to prevent an unfortunate situation from becoming tragic.

With regard to the situation in Aceh, the Government of Indonesia has developed the Recovery Aceh Nias (RAN) database — which is based on the Development Assistance Database of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) — to monitor and evaluate work being carried out in the province. The RAN database provides official information for project reporting and tracking, covering all organizations involved in the recovery process and how they are responding to identified community needs.

Finally, I should like to touch upon the issue of international assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. Indonesia appreciates the Secretary-General's report on that subject (*A/60/90*) and fully endorses the view that only a peace process and a full and definitive settlement of the conflict will permit a transition from crisis management and recovery to sustainable development and prosperity. We urge that the Palestinian people be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination, including by establishing their own State.

Indonesia, as a country affected by the tsunami in December 2004, also appreciates the practical value of the various recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his other reports. However, it is not enough for sound recommendations to be made; they must inspire a rapid response on the part of the international community.

Ms. Juul (Norway): As we meet here in New York, some 300,000 Pakistanis are facing the coming winter in Kashmir without the necessary shelter and assistance. At the same time, an estimated 10 million people are facing drought and severe food shortages in Southern Africa. In both cases, the response from donors to United Nations appeals has been slow. We must face the fact that we have failed.

We believe that those two humanitarian crises could have been handled differently — and more effectively — if the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had been equipped with the tools necessary for dealing with the fierce forces of nature or of man.

The role of the United Nations in emergency humanitarian assistance is increasingly important, because its services are in great demand. Strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance is required, because we have an obligation to supply help to those in need.

Providing the United Nations with the necessary resources is essential, because we want it to be a strong coordinator. Norway therefore welcomes the upgrading of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), which will make it a permanent emergency fund that can quickly respond to — and possibly prevent — crises like the one in Southern Africa. We are anxious to see an upgraded CERF operational as early as possible in 2006.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In keeping with the United Nations humanitarian reform agenda, the Fund's main purpose is to improve international response capacity. That means improving the speed, equity and predictability of humanitarian responses on the ground. Indeed, that is required. Increasingly, the United Nations and the donor community are faced with demands for quick and flexible responses to sudden-impact, complex emergencies. Furthermore, an upgraded CERF is necessary to ensure a better and more systematic focus on neglected emergencies. It will provide funding that will allow agencies to respond to appeals that donors collectively have not yet been able to fund to the extent needed.

A new CERF is not a goal in itself. For Norway, the key criterion for the success of humanitarian reform is that it more effectively meet humanitarian needs on the ground. The Fund is an important step towards that goal, and we intend to cooperate closely with OCHA, with other relevant United Nations agencies and with Member States to ensure that CERF becomes a successful financial mechanism.

But we will not be able to provide flexible and speedy funding unless certain conditions are met. There must be an unbureaucratic and flexible advisory group structure. There must be clear criteria for the allocation of resources. There must be strong leadership and a high degree of consensus — both between the United Nations and donors and between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — regarding how those criteria are to be applied in practice. There must be accurate needs assessments and appropriate accounting and

reporting mechanisms. We would also like to see better and more systematic dialogue with NGOs on how we can improve our response capacity.

Good humanitarian donorship requires that humanitarian financing be adequate, flexible and predictable. The new CERF will provide an opportunity for us to encourage higher levels of donor funding and to demonstrate in practice the true value of our humanitarian principles. Our goal — our mandate — is improved humanitarian response, not financial redistribution.

The time has come to have done with the perpetual underfunding of standby and preparedness mechanisms. Therefore, the Norwegian Government has pledged 200 million Norwegian kroner — approximately $30 million — to the Fund. Those are additional funds. We urge other donors to contribute similar amounts.

Mr. Briz Gutiérrez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala associates itself fully with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on this subject. We shall comment first on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters and secondly on the improvement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF).

There can be no question that humanitarian issues are of fundamental importance in the context of emergencies. However, our debates and shared experiences have demonstrated that risk reduction and preventive action with respect to vulnerable persons are the best way to contribute to reducing the impact of disasters.

For that reason, Guatemala concurs with the Secretary-General's recommendation that the relevant United Nations organizations and donor Governments should strengthen the capacities of disaster-prone countries in disaster mitigation, preparedness and response as well as post-disaster recovery, within a disaster-risk-reduction framework.

Coping with such problems requires a global response — hence the importance of strengthening cooperation with and technical assistance to Governments, so that concrete actions may be taken in the area of the prevention and mitigation of disasters.

Recent storms and hurricanes, such as Stan, Wilma and Beta, have, regrettably, confirmed Central America's vulnerability to natural disasters. It is a well-known fact that during the June-November period the region is prone to hurricanes, storms, floods and mudslides; that from November to June it can suffer droughts and forest fires; and that during any one-year period beginning in June, it can be hit by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tidal waves.

Guatemala, by reason of its geographic position and geological characteristics, is a country of multiple and varied landscapes as well as climates — a country that is highly vulnerable and exposed to various types of disasters.

We have learned in the hardest possible way that a disaster, in addition to its devastating effects on human security and sustainable development, also can pose serious threats to the social fabric. Last month's catastrophic mudslides, brought about by the torrential rain caused by hurricane Stan, not only inflicted serious damage on Guatemala's infrastructure but also resulted in the deaths of a large number of people in predominantly indigenous communities, which was highly detrimental to the social fabric of the country.

Concerning the recommendation calling for enhancing the role played by regional organizations, we concur as to the need to strengthen regional cooperation, which has enabled us to achieve a higher level of coordination in coping with disasters. That is why Guatemala firmly supports the efforts being made by the region in the context of the Central American Integration System. We are cooperating with the other countries of the region in that context as part of our efforts to support the work being done by the Coordination Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America.

Turning now to the enhancement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), Guatemala agrees that there is a need to modernize it and welcomes the proposal to that effect contained in the Secretary-General's report. We understand that upgrading the present Fund would entail not just a reform of the overall United Nations system for responding to humanitarian crises but the creation of a more efficient rapid-reaction mechanism endowed with predictable funding available to all in an equitable manner.

My delegation supports the modernization of the Fund and in particular improving humanitarian

response in under-funded crisis situations. We believe that this is the best way to make sure that cases of "unnoticed" emergencies receive the attention they deserve. My delegation considers that all natural disasters are of equal importance and that they should not be ranked according to the number of deaths, the magnitude of the destruction or the scope of international media coverage. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster clearly demonstrated that extraordinary amounts of financing can be mustered provided the necessary political will and commitments exist.

In that respect, we wish to express our concern at the criteria and guidelines that are to be used in the operation of the new Fund, particularly as regards the role that the proposed advisory group will have in the allocation of funds. It is certainly normal procedure for funds to have bodies or committees responsible for deciding whether or not to grant financial assistance. We consider, however, that this is not the most appropriate arrangement in the case of emergencies, where response time is of the essence. For the moment, my delegation is looking into the matter, but we wish to point out that any process by which the group is selected must be based, as a minimum, on adequate and equitable geographical distribution.

Our actions take place in the framework established by resolution 46/182, particularly the principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity, with regard to humanitarian assistance.

Guatemala deems it essential that the cultural specificities of countries be taken into account. The population of Guatemala comprises a considerable proportion of indigenous peoples, whose community tradition is a fundamental contributing factor both to the successful management of a system of humanitarian crisis relief as well as to the success of subsequent post-disaster recovery operations.

The aim of modernizing the Fund is to save lives, but we cannot overlook the issue of post-disaster recovery. As the Secretary-General quite rightly points out, gaps exist in the capacities of United Nations mechanisms to support post-disaster recovery. Guatemala supports the efforts of the United Nations to establish an international recovery platform to bridge such gaps.

We are grateful for the efforts made to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian disaster-relief assistance provided by the United Nations and by all those countries that are part of the never-ending struggle to mitigate the consequences of disasters. In that respect, we appreciate the endeavours of the Under-Secretary-General and of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In closing, I should like to express my delegation's gratitude to the international community for its show of solidarity in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Stan. I wish also to thank Member States for their support for the draft resolution submitted by my delegation on humanitarian and post-recovery assistance for El Salvador and Guatemala, which was adopted by consensus by the Second Committee last Friday.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I should like to thank the Secretary-General for having prepared and submitted reports on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. The documents contain a comprehensive assessment of the regions that are suffering from the consequences of natural disasters and of the work being done by Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance and to bring life back to normal in those areas.

The reports contain concrete recommendations on enhancing and coordinating the joint efforts under way and also on providing assistance to mitigate the consequences of natural and manmade disasters.

The past year has been an extremely difficult one in terms of the number of natural disasters that have affected many States, as a result of which hundreds of thousands of people have died. Millions of people have been left homeless, without any means of survival. The destructive impact of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the earthquake in Pakistan and India, the flooding in South Asia and the hurricanes in the United States and Latin America, as well as the mudslides and snowstorms in Central Asia and other natural disasters, have placed a heavy burden on the Governments and the peoples of the affected countries. We are firmly convinced that the international community cannot remain indifferent to such tragedies, which can strike anyone, anywhere. We believe that it is only by pooling its efforts that the international community can mitigate the effects of natural disasters.

We need to build upon initiatives, as soon as possible, to create a permanent early warning system for natural disasters. Of critical importance here for the countries and regions affected by natural disasters is the timely provision of assistance.

Based on our belief in common humanitarian values and principles, the Republic of Kazakhstan has provided as much assistance as possible to victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami and of the earthquake in Pakistan. We believe that by meeting our obligations to provide assistance, first of all by donor countries, and enhancing coordination and support by countries and international organizations, it will help overcome the consequences of natural disasters and save the lives of thousands of people in the affected regions.

As the Secretary-General points out in his report on optimizing the international effort to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster (*A/60/443*), 19 years after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, hundreds of thousands of people in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine are still suffering the consequences, one of which has been an increase in the incidence of cancer.

We have not been able to rehabilitate the means of survival for people in the affected regions whose lives were destroyed by this disaster. Here I would like to point out that radiological disasters, unlike other disasters, spread beyond the crisis area itself, and overcoming the consequences takes decades.

In the years since the disaster occurred, major work has been done by Belarus, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Governments of many other countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to mitigate the consequences of that accident, which affected the people and environment in the region. Kazakhstan welcomes the work carried out by United Nations agencies aimed at supporting a new rehabilitation strategy for the affected regions. The practical steps the United Nations agencies and funds are taking in this area will indeed facilitate early rehabilitation for the people and environment of the region.

We highly appreciate the assistance given by donor countries in implementing various projects in the affected regions of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. I wish to mention the World Health Organization's Chernobyl Telemedicine Project; the UNICEF project on life skills and healthy lifestyle education in Chernobyl-affected areas; and the Swiss project to improve health care for mothers and children. These projects exemplify the search for new ways to rehabilitate and provide assistance to all those who have been affected by the Chernobyl accident.

The month of April 2006 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the catastrophe, one of the worst in history. We believe that that anniversary will be a major international event and will once again remind the international community of the unpredictable consequences of such types of accidents. It will also draw the attention of the international community to the needs of the people who have suffered from the accident and mobilize additional assistance to mitigate the consequences of the disaster.

We support the proposal contained in the report of the Secretary-General to organize a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, as well as the proposal to declare 26 April as a day to commemorate the victims of radiation accidents.

Kazakhstan also supports the adoption of the draft resolution (*A/60/L.19*), on Chernobyl, submitted to the current session of the General Assembly and is one of its sponsors.

Mrs. Dashti (Kuwait): We would like to associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. My delegation would like to focus its statement on agenda item 73 (a), on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations.

Kuwait would like to express its deepest condolences and sympathy to the Governments and people that were victims of the natural disasters that have taken their toll on the livelihoods and economies of several countries in Southern Asia, the Caribbean and North America.

The rapid response of the international community, Governments, non-profit organizations, civil society and financial institutions in providing immediate humanitarian relief efforts reflects a spirit of international solidarity and cooperation. Kuwait was prompt to respond to such crises by offering financial assistance and humanitarian relief, earmarking $100 million for the victims of the tsunami disaster and

another $100 million for the victims of the latest earthquakes in Southern Asia.

Kuwait has entrusted the Kuwait National Red Crescent to coordinate with other international organizations and competent authorities in the affected countries with the delivery of such aid. Beyond that immediate relief, Kuwait will continue to address the issue of reconstruction and development. Indeed, Kuwait has entrusted the Kuwait Fund to follow up on the reconstruction aspect of its assistance programme.

The recent devastation caused by natural disasters should alert us all to the need for closer cooperation towards the establishment of an early warning system and the need for the coordination of efforts for the supply of aid and relief immediately after the impact of a natural disaster. The international community should focus as well on enhancing existing national and regional capacities to meet demands for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its efforts in promoting and coordinating disaster response among the United Nations humanitarian agencies and donor countries. We support the continued effort by the international community to find the means to strengthen rapid response capacity in providing humanitarian relief. We would also like to recognize the significant role played by the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Society in disaster response.

In conclusion, we emphasize the need for the international community, including donor countries and financial institutions, to deliver promptly on their pledges to continue to provide the necessary funds and assistance to support reconstruction efforts.

Ms. Singh (Nepal): Nepal attaches great importance to the work of the United Nations towards strengthening humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to victims of natural and man-made disasters. My delegation expresses sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for his various reports providing comprehensive information on the humanitarian work of the United Nations.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I would like to make some remarks on a couple of points that are of particular significance to my delegation.

We still have fresh memories of the massive loss of life and property that resulted from the Indian tsunami, the hurricanes in the Caribbean region and the earthquakes that occurred this year and in 2004. My delegation shares in the expressions of deep condolence and sympathy conveyed to all victims, their families and the peoples of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, who suffered huge losses of life and property due to the massive earthquake that occurred in South Asia last month. We express our appreciation to the international community for its united response in providing humanitarian relief assistance to the victims of natural disasters. His Majesty's Government of Nepal was pleased to join others in making a modest contribution to our friendly neighbouring countries in their hour of great need.

Obviously, natural disasters have done great damage to socio-economic development, as well as to infrastructure and the environment. Millions of people have become homeless. The more vulnerable sectors of society, such as women and children — especially orphans and widows — have been greatly affected. We thank the United Nations and its agencies for their valuable work in providing emergency relief to these victims, as well as their assistance for long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation work.

Recurring natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes pose a great challenge to the international community with respect to peace and sustainable development in the world. Many developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, need technical and financial assistance to strengthen national capacities for dealing with the various stages of natura' disaster response, including prevention, preparedness, mitigation, recovery and reconstruction.

My delegation shares the concern expressed over the inadequate response in terms of financial and technical resources for humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disasters. We support the efforts of the United Nations to develop multipronged strategies for enhancing national ownership and leadership and strengthening disaster response capacities, including risk reduction and resource mobilization. We welcome the recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (*A/60/432*) on the improvement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to include a grant element alongside the existing loan element in

the Fund. We have no objection to changing the Fund's name to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

Natural disasters are among the major obstacles to sustainable socio-economic development in my country. Due to its geographical and geotectonic conditions, Nepal is prone to earthquakes. Major disasters to which Nepal is vulnerable, in addition to earthquakes, include floods, drought, landslides, epidemics, glacial lake outburst floods, fire and ecological hazards. Over the years, my country has suffered great loss of life and property, as well as damage to development infrastructure, as a result of earthquakes and floods.

At the national level, Nepal's 1982 Natural Disaster Relief Act, as amended, sets out the measures to be undertaken for the pre-disaster, preparedness, response and immediate relief, and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation phases. Various institutional mechanisms ranging from the local to the national level have been established. The Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee, headed by the Home Minister, is responsible for formulating policies and programmes and undertaking activities dealing with natural disasters. His Majesty's Government attaches importance to collaborative efforts with United Nations agencies, civil society, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders in carrying out those programmes. The Participatory Disaster Management Programme has helped to create public awareness and strengthen national disaster management capacities.

In addition to natural disasters, terrorist activities in recent years have caused a great loss of life and damage to property and the country's development infrastructure. His Majesty's Government of Nepal is fully committed to ensuring the safety and security of the people and to restoring peace and stability. It has also provided humanitarian relief to internally displaced persons. My delegation urges the international community to provide support to strengthen and complement our national efforts.

Humanitarian assistance aims at lasting peace and sustainable development. The international community should continue its cooperation with the countries affected by natural disasters with a view to strengthening national capacities for providing enhanced emergency relief to victims of natural disasters.

Mr. Berruga (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation expresses its gratitude for the support and offers of assistance extended by the international community to assist the Mexican communities badly affected by the passage of Hurricanes Stan and Wilma during the present hurricane season.

In the past two years, we have witnessed natural disasters that have caused great losses of life and the destruction of infrastructure. As a sign of our solidarity and taking into account that we ourselves are in the process of recovery, Mexico has made financial and in-kind contributions to support the efforts to assist the victims of the hurricanes in the United States, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Furthermore, I have the honour to announce that my country will actively participate in the donors conference to be held in Islamabad on 19 November. We will shortly make an unearmarked contribution to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes in Pakistan.

Some 300 million people have been affected by various natural disasters in recent months. Material losses amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. Regrettably, in all those cases, the majority of victims have been among populations with the least resources.

For that reason, we stress the need to redouble our efforts to strengthen strategies for responding to natural disasters, with a long-term perspective and within a framework of a genuine culture of prevention, supported by the promotion of development. Similarly, we attach great importance to risk identification and mitigation, with the highest priority being given to the most vulnerable sectors.

It is essential that we, the Member States of the Organization, try to limit our endless debates on the conceptual framework and return to a more pragmatic debate on fundamental questions such as the establishment of the overall lines of action for the prompt and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as a coordination strategy involving States, civil society and humanitarian organizations, with the aim of channelling assistance towards a response to real needs and avoiding the uncoordinated flow of resources.

My delegation actively participated in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe, Japan

in January 2005, and considers that implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action is an excellent basis for achieving the goals that I have just described.

However, it should be noted that all those efforts will be in vain if they are not accompanied by national and global plans for the protection of the environment. Given the irrefutable proof of the link between the growing number of natural disasters and the continued destruction of our environment, we deeply regret the refusal of some States to sign or ratify the relevant international treaties — particularly the Kyoto Protocol — whose full implementation would contribute significantly to the stability of our ecosystem.

Mexico supports the recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General on this item. We reaffirm our commitment to the international framework regulating the provision of humanitarian assistance, in keeping with our guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and with full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 46/182.

However, we note with deep concern the recent tendency to interpret those principles in a way that impedes the access of humanitarian personnel to affected populations when the State exercising jurisdiction over them is unwilling or unable to guarantee that it will fulfil its obligation to protect.

In addition, we are concerned at the selective attention given to the needs of countries experiencing humanitarian crises. We firmly believe that the resources allocated for such emergencies should not be determined by political considerations or by interests inimical to the principles of humanitarian assistance. Therefore, the Mexican Government has adopted a policy of making non-earmarked donations — such as that announced by the representative of Pakistan — to enable United Nations humanitarian entities to provide aid that meets needs on the ground.

In line with that position, my country has actively supported expanding the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, whose strengthening will accelerate the process of the Organization's humanitarian crisis response and provide funding for crises that lack of sufficient resources because of their low political profile. In that regard, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Mexican Government is holding internal consultations to determine when we can contribute to the Fund.

Finally, I should like to reaffirm the importance attached by my delegation to the phase of transition from emergency to development. We are convinced that, insofar as we give greater priority to the phases of prevention, reconstruction and institutional strengthening, we will create sustainable conditions for peace and social stability. Mexico therefore supports and is actively participating in the discussions on establishing the Peacebuilding Commission. We hope to see those efforts translated into action as soon as possible, in keeping with the commitment expressed at the 2005 world summit held in September.

Mrs. Holguín (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports on humanitarian assistance. We congratulate Jan Egeland on his commitment and thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its work. We congratulate the staff of the Office on its commitment and dedication to humanitarian aid.

We wish to reaffirm our solidarity with the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan and the hurricanes in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. The United Nations system has the great challenge of assisting in the reconstruction and in helping to return to normal the lives of the people in the affected areas, working closely with their Governments to consolidate strategies and long-term programmes that will permit effective recovery measures.

Humanitarian assistance must be provided with a deep conviction to work and cooperate with States and to support Governments' efforts to improve their response capacity and infrastructure so that they can better face such challenges. That is the only way to ensure sustainability in dealing with emergencies. Moreover, assistance must be provided in a way that upholds the guiding principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

We must be strict about not politicizing humanitarian assistance and respect its guiding principles. Failure to do so will weaken the system's response capacity, resulting in a loss of legitimacy and

credibility. Elaborating strategies that supplant States and weaken their response capacity will not produce the desired benefits. Creating operative frameworks for specific situations will not be positive for the system. Short-term success must not be confused with sustainability and the capacity to deal with emergencies.

Focusing on needs is important: it ensures that principles are respected and that efficient and effective responses are provided to solve specific problems. The example of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) should be the rule, not the exception, in humanitarian assistance. The ICRC's credibility and legitimacy are due to its decades-long work throughout the world in compliance with international humanitarian law. The United Nations system should profit from those successful experiences.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator has asked that we study his proposal for the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. My delegation believes that efforts to improve United Nations humanitarian coordination deserve consideration and analysis, and that is one of them. The General Assembly must review the proposal without weakening its decision-making capacity in this area. We do not agree that the Assembly should be asked to create new structures and then receive no reports about them later. If it did that the Assembly would continue to lose its management, decision-making and oversight capacities.

The updating of the Fund must be carried out with a view to accountability to the General Assembly, which must guide its work and priorities to ensure that the Fund meets needs resulting from emergencies. Accountability to the Assembly goes far beyond an annual report on the Fund's management, of which we would only take note. We believe that the General Assembly must oversee the Fund's management, and we are prepared to work with other States to find the best way to do that. This is a process that will make it possible to revitalize the General Assembly.

This year has been particularly difficult for humanitarian assistance. My delegation supports initiatives that seek to improve such assistance, ever mindful that the consent and cooperation of States are essential to its functioning.

Mr. Morote (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on humanitarian assistance.

My delegation supports the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters indicates that the economic costs of natural disasters have increased fourteenfold since the 1950s, not including losses of human lives. Those disasters should alert us to the magnitude of the humanitarian challenge and to the imperative need for more coordinated and effective action throughout the United Nations system. Such a new attitude must also face up to the Organization's fundamental limitations in terms of the lack of human and financial resources for risk reduction and the need to improve and increase its disaster-relief activities.

In that context, it is important to carefully differentiate among the origins, characteristics, damage potential and mitigation measures for each kind of disaster. There are disasters of a clearly natural origin, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis, which cannot be prevented and which constitute only 15 per cent of all disasters. Then there are disasters that are directly or indirectly influenced by humankind and which thus require that we modify our habits of production and consumption and our way of living to prevent them.

Among the damage-potential factors, the strategies that are designed and implemented must take into account the lack of political will, inappropriate development models, deficiencies in governance, inequalities within a population and the growing vulnerability of developing countries, countries in transition and, in particular, countries suffering high levels of poverty, conflict, disease and a lack of medicines and healthcare facilities, among other things.

According to a recent Pentagon report on climate change and security, the environment is now a factor of international stability and security. That affirmation is based on the following conclusions.

First, global warming could lead to an abrupt paralysation of the ocean currents, which would bring more severe winters, a drastic reduction of soil moisture, desertification, intense winds, forest fires, cyclones, more acute El Niño phenomena, torrential

rains, storms, typhoons and floods in certain regions of the world.

Secondly, climate change, whose effects would vary by area and season, would contribute to the loss of biodiversity, affect a significant portion of the world's food production and have a severe impact on energy and freshwater resources.

My delegation wishes to underline the following necessary strategies.

First, we must act in a comprehensive and systematic manner. We must establish timely and unrestricted early warning systems and improve rapid response capacities, taking advantage of local actors close to the disaster site. We must put in place preventive measures, including public awareness campaigns, programmes for disaster preparation, mitigation and recovery and programmes for rehabilitation, reconstruction and the restoration of authority and the rule of law. In addition, we must facilitate sustainable ways of living and create conditions conducive to development. North-South and South-South cooperation must be encouraged, as should the participation of experts and the transfer of technology and practical know-how.

We must define the specific roles and improve the capacities of States, of the United Nations and its relevant bodies, of other international organizations including international financial institutions, of regional organizations, local governments, communities and military personnel, and of experts, non-governmental organizations, private enterprise and the media, among other civil society actors.

Thus Peru proposes that the United Nations adopt the following specific actions.

We must improve our capacity for a rapid and effective response to natural disasters by making adjustments to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team with respect to damages and needs assessment, and by strengthening the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction.

It is important to strengthen the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) through the provision of adequate material, financial, technical and human resources support for its goal of enhancing the quality and quantity of humanitarian assistance. In that way, OCHA will be able to coordinate assistance to the victims of natural and man-made disasters with greater effectiveness.

In addition, in light of its vast experience and prestige in the area of humanitarian disaster assistance, OCHA should issue annual reports on its activities in natural disaster relief containing an assessment of its experiences and general and specific recommendations.

In that context, I wish to highlight the proposal contained in the report of the Secretary-General with respect to the participation of the private sector in humanitarian emergency response. It is highly relevant and should be given consideration. I am certain that numerous multinational corporations with global business interests would be interested in participating. We could perhaps promote a global compact for disaster assistance between the United Nations and those corporations.

Likewise, we support the recommendation of the Secretary-General regarding an appropriate institutional synergy, through which each United Nations mission, in each country where they are deployed, could function as an integrated entity, thus enabling the Organization to more effectively respond to potential humanitarian crises anywhere in the world.

Peru expresses its support for the establishment of an international humanitarian fund, and for the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance and the International Recovery Platform. It supports the expansion of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to include a grants element alongside its existing loans component. We look forward to learning further details of the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a standing global response capacity under United Nations auspices.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the role of the media, which can contribute indirectly to international financing by giving disasters a level of visibility equal to the severity of their impact.

Mr. Sen (India): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports that have been prepared for the discussion under this item. India would also like to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77.

The past year has, unfortunately, witnessed several major natural disasters in various parts of the world. Some have affected India.

The earthquake that occurred in the northern reaches of the Indian subcontinent on 8 October was particularly devastating. Given the magnitude of the human tragedy, as a neighbour and a member of the international community, India promptly conveyed its readiness to extend any assistance, including rescue and relief, that the Government of Pakistan might deem appropriate.

During the meeting on assistance to communities affected by the South Asia earthquake, held in Geneva on 26 October, India also pledged a contribution of $25 million as assistance to the Government of Pakistan for relief and rehabilitation of victims affected by the earthquake. Those funds are being made available by the Government of India to the Government of Pakistan for providing relief to victims, building homes, rehabilitating people and reconstructing the infrastructure and restoring essential services.

The Government of Pakistan is welcome to use those funds for sourcing supplies of building materials such as cement and other items from India. The technology available in India for prefabricating earthquake resistant shelters can also be accessed by means of the fund.

One of the most important proposals for consideration under the agenda item is that of the improvement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). We have repeatedly seen that timely and adequate funding of relief efforts in the initial phases is crucial for saving lives and providing assistance to victims of sudden natural calamities.

The report of the Secretary-General (*A/60/432*) analyses the funding shortages faced by the majority of flash appeals, especially in the initial phases of emergency operations. Late delivery of funds constrains efforts to mount a rapid response and to save lives in the early days and months. An improved CERF would indeed make humanitarian funding predictable. Moreover, by allocating one third of the Fund's grant facility to underfunded emergencies, the new Fund is expected to address the needs of countries that do not have the benefit of a "CNN effect".

The report has provided details of funding received in the first month in response to flash appeals during 2002-2005, as a percentage of total requirements in each case. In eight cases the funding received in the first month was less than 20 per cent of what was needed. The report also cites the case of slow onset crises such as the desert locust problem in the Sahel, where timely action would have saved about $90 million later on. We therefore agree with the Secretary-General on the need to improve the CERF and to have it operational by early next year.

It is important that the new CERF continues to operate in accordance with resolution 46/182 and the guiding principles annexed to the resolution. We have noted that the report of the Secretary-General has included a section on the governance of the Fund along those lines. The General Assembly has on numerous occasions, including in the guiding principles of resolution 46/182, stated that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and on the basis of an appeal by it. It also emphasizes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Moreover, coordination of all types of external assistance must be done by the recipient Government, to ensure better coherence and coordination of the relief effort.

While we support the idea of improving CERF, we find that the report fails to outline clear criteria and guidelines for allocation of funds from the new CERF. The report states that the Emergency Relief Coordinator will approve all grants awarded by the Fund in accordance with its overall objectives. In case of competing demands, the discretion would seem to vest with the Coordinator. We feel that detailed criteria and guidelines for allocation of funds need to be developed, with the approval of Member States, so that the Coordinator would need to use discretion only in rare cases. In his annual report to the General Assembly on expenditures made from the improved CERF, the Cordinator should be required to provide justification for such exceptions for consideration of and future guidance by Member States.

The report claims that the modernized Fund will contribute to the realization of other elements of humanitarian reform, including strengthening of humanitarian coordination and response capacity. However, the report does not help us to understand how that would be achieved.

The new CERF has set itself an ambitious target of $500 million. Thus, as compared to the existing arrangement of a $50 million revolving facility, the improved CERF aims to raise $450 million on a yearly basis. It is presumed that contributions made to CERF

would not come at the expense of funding for development activities, but would be new and additional to such funding. Moreover, CERF focuses only on relief activities. The improved CERF would not cover the rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of disaster-affected countries.

While improving the capacity to provide relief in the wake of disasters, there is also a need to examine how the gap between relief and development can be bridged. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled "The transition from relief to development" contained in document A/60/89, has also highlighted the need for adequate and timely funding of transitions to meet enduring humanitarian, recovery and peace consolidation priorities, while simultaneously focusing on building national and local capacities.

General Assembly resolution 59/250, entitled "Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system", urged the United Nations agencies and donor community, in coordination with national authorities, to begin planning the transition to development and taking measures supportive of that transition, such as institutional and capacity-building, from the beginning of the relief phase.

The resolution stressed the need for transitional activities to be undertaken under national ownership through the development of national capacities at all levels to manage the transition process. There is need to look at the issue of national capacity development and national ownership as a priority in post-conflict situations.

The Secretary-General's report focusing on the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, contained in document A/60/86, identifies the lessons learned from the humanitarian efforts and key issues emerging from the ongoing recovery efforts in the affected countries. Given the scale of the damage caused by the tsunami last December, the recovery effort would need to continue over a period of time.

General Assembly resolution 59/279, on the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, has emphasized the need for the international community to maintain its focus beyond emergency relief and to support the medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts of the Governments of the affected countries. We fully endorse that approach.

Early warning is a crucial dimension and we are prepared to share our experience in this area with other countries in the region. An early warning system against tsunamis devised by Indian scientists is being set up in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, and is expected to become operational during 2006.

The Secretary-General's report entitled, International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development, contained in document A/60/227, states that it is possible to close the gap between relief and development and transform disasters into opportunities for sustainable development. That is the case when efforts are made, among others, to support local and national recovery processes at an early stage. India is convinced of the need for continuing international engagement in the post-disaster period, for restoring livelihoods, building resilience and reducing vulnerability. We hope that the Secretary-General will focus on meeting that long-felt need, even as we work towards improving CERF.

International cooperation in tackling natural disasters makes us realize once again that the world is one family, as the ancient Indian thinkers had written. This gives life to international solidarity and hope to multilateralism by making that concept a part of the lives of ordinary people. As in the past, India is again coordinating for the Group of 77 the draft resolution entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development".

Mr. Boonpracong (Thailand): My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statements made by Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by Malaysia on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. My delegation would like to shed light on some issues that are important to my delegation, as Thailand is also a country affected by the tsunami disaster last December.

My delegation sincerely commends the reports of the Secretary-General, which clearly introduce an insight into the obstacles and lessons learned from the humanitarian response effort that come out of the ongoing recovery effort in affected countries. Thailand is well aware that the more challenging tasks which lie ahead are rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery and prevention of the impact in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. We have been making the utmost

effort at all levels in order to ensure that the people who have been affected can return to their normal lives as soon as possible.

At the national level, financial and monetary restrictions have been relaxed, among other measures, so as to help to provide local people and entrepreneurs affected by the tsunami with the time and space to recover and restructure their businesses. At the international level, partnerships have been formed with many countries and organizations, as well as with regional and international financial institutions, with a view to providing support to the affected communities and vulnerable groups to help in the restoration of their livelihoods and in the recovery of their economic means of survival and their access to services.

Thailand accords priority to the strengthening of the resilience of local communities in the affected areas. Greater knowledge and understanding among the general public about natural disasters is also important and needs to be reinforced. We have integrated the subject of tsunamis into education programmes so as to ensure that our people are well aware of disaster risk and reduction. We also set up local early warning centres. In addition, the first tsunami evacuation drill was organized in Phuket in April 2005, and more than 2,000 people, including members of the diplomatic corps in Thailand, took part.

The aftermath of the tsunami has brought with it a great and true sense of solidarity in the international community, as witnessed by the outpouring of assistance in all forms and by all actors from around the world. For its part, Thailand welcomes and is committed to the initiative agreed at the Global Consortium for Tsunami-Affected Countries, aimed at improving and ensuring effective coordination and the transparent, accountable and efficient use of the assistance provided for tsunami relief, recovery and reconstruction. We have established an online Development Assistance Database, which provides details on all matters relevant to tsunami relief and recovery, including project-level information on commitments, disbursements, expenditures, donors and implementers, as well as key outputs and information about the progress made so far.

Also at the international level, a tsunami ministerial meeting was held in Phuket, at which initiatives to establish regional tsunami early warning arrangements, as well as a voluntary trust fund on tsunami early warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia, were agreed. The voluntary trust fund has now been instituted, and is administered by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific. It is aimed at enhancing national and regional tsunami early warning centres, and complements and forms an integral part of the Indian Ocean tsunami warning system being coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. Since the trust fund is voluntary, contributions from members and stakeholders, including international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, the private sector and individuals, are more than welcome.

On 26 December 2005, the Thai Government will be organizing a tsunami commemorative event in honour of those we lost and to express gratitude for the sympathy and generosity we received from around the world. At the memorial service to mark the event, we will lay the foundation stone for a tsunami memorial in remembrance of those who lost their lives. We invite all members to join us in commemorating that particularly mournful day to remember those who lost their lives in the tragedy and to remind us how vulnerable we all are to the forces of nature.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We are gathered here today to discuss what has been a lifeline for the Palestinian people throughout the past decades of occupation and deprivation. International assistance to the Palestinian people has, more recently, been a vital component of the international community's efforts to make concrete the foothold of stability and peace in the region. That assistance translated the Palestinian people's vision for sustainable development into tangible projects and programmes, which made Palestinians feel that they were not alone and that the world wanted to see a brighter future for their children. Unfortunately, the international community's good will and generous efforts were always confronted by the obstructive nature of the Israeli occupation. Following 38 years of military occupation and the past five years of unabated military aggression, the Palestinian economy now stands in ruins.

After 1967, the Palestinian economy remained hostage to the occupying Power, forced to be completely dependant on it and forbidden from reaching its potential. Palestinian society and the Palestinian economy were neglected and fell decades behind their neighbours in terms of development and

infrastructure. When the Palestinian Authority was formed, therefore, it had to start from scratch. The components of the economy were lacking — starting with basic infrastructure like water and sewerage systems. The task was daunting and the historical responsibility was enormous.

Working hand in hand with the international community, the Palestinian Authority has been able to achieve great progress in many areas, despite the repeated setbacks caused by the occupying Power's concerted efforts to obstruct or disrupt the progress. A litany of pretexts and excuses were used that only translated into the further frustration of the efforts made to enable the Palestinian People to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights, which are a basic constituent of their inalienable right to self-determination. Those Israeli obstructions are also a grave violation of international humanitarian and human rights law as well as signed agreements, in particular the Paris Protocol.

The past five years have witnessed a downward spiral in the Israeli attitude towards international assistance efforts, which has gone from obstruction to destruction. Israel, the occupying Power, systematically destroyed a host of internationally funded infrastructure projects, including the airport, the sea port, roads and water networks and many others. The most conservative estimates put the cost of that destructive Israeli campaign at $3.5 billion. They also estimate that, owing to those Israeli practices, the Palestinian economy lost approximately $6.4 billion in potential income and missed opportunities, bringing total Palestinian losses in the past five years alone to $9.9 billion. That staggering figure far exceeds the overall international assistance received by the Palestinian people between 1994 and 1999, when the projects, now destroyed, were funded. A sizeable portion of that momentous loss was contributed by generous donors represented in the Assembly.

Concurrent with the methodical destruction of infrastructure and public and private property, the occupying Power has implemented a number of collective punishment measures against the Palestinian people, worsening an already dire situation. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (A/60/65), Israel, the occupying Power, has enforced a closure regime of over 700 roadblocks and checkpoints that severely restrict the movement of Palestinian persons and goods.

Additionally, the occupying Power has destroyed and confiscated Palestinian land and property that were in the way of the expanding illegal settlements. Also, Israel's wall, deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in its 2004 Advisory Opinion, has caused untold damage to the Palestinian economy. These practices all have contributed to an increase in the Palestinian people's dependence on international assistance and shifted the emphasis of that assistance from development to relief. Numerous independent international studies and reports, including by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank, have pointed out that the regressive state of the Palestinian economy and living standards are due to the aggressive Israeli measures I have just discussed.

The international community welcomed Israel's dismantling of settlements and its exit from the Gaza Strip, only to be frustrated by the Israeli practices following the exit. While we also noted that the Israeli exit represented a step towards implementing the road map, we remain disappointed by the situation on the ground thus far. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to close the Gaza Strip's gateways to the world and to the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, forbid construction work on the Gaza seaport and airport, and attack its towns and neighbourhoods. In fact, Mr. James Wolfensohn, the Quartet Special Envoy for Disengagement, summarized the situation in a letter to the Secretary-General dated 16 October 2005, when he said that the occupying Power "is loath to relinquish control, almost acting as though there has been no withdrawal". Mr. Wolfensohn has also emphasized that there is no hope for economic revitalization in the occupied Palestinian territory if the Gaza Strip and West Bank remain disjoined and the Gaza Strip remains sealed off from the rest of the world.

Despite the dire situation I have just outlined, the Palestinian Authority insists on looking ahead and on working for a brighter tomorrow — one that is marked by freedom and prosperity rather than by occupation and poverty. The international community shares that vision of peace and development with the Palestinian Authority and has supported its achievement by assisting in the implementation of development plans formulated by the Palestinian Authority over the past 10 years.

That shared vision also contributed to the establishment of Palestinian institutions that continue

to work diligently towards being competent and transparent, worthy of serving as a foundation for the future independent State. The Palestinian leadership takes this task and responsibility very seriously, as evident in the continuous reform steps taken, which have been applauded by several international organizations.

The Palestinian Authority has formulated a medium-term development plan. We call on the international community to endorse that plan and to ensure that the plan's projects are funded promptly in order that optimum results may be reached. This should be done in the context of guaranteeing an increase in Palestinian ownership of the process. In that regard, allow me to highlight the Palestinian people's deep gratitude for the international community's continued assistance and support as well as our sincere appreciation for the often selfless work done and sacrifices made by the staff of international aid agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We also urge the international community to ensure that their generous pledges correspond with the funds disbursed later on, in order to ensure the uninterrupted and successful implementation of the development plan. Additionally, we call on the donor community to give its full support to the United Nations inter-agency consolidated appeals process for the occupied Palestinian territory. It cannot be overemphasized that relief and development efforts in the occupied Palestinian territory should go hand in hand, as both are vital for achieving the desired development goals.

The international community must not allow Israel to continue defying its obligations as an occupying Power through the illegal policies and practices that have led to the state of economic regression Palestine now faces. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the international community to ensure that the occupying Power does not continue to carry out acts of aggression against the projects it funds and the aid workers it employs with impunity, as these repeated attacks have derailed the development process and frustrated assistance efforts.

Finally, the cause of this state of utter destitution is known to all parties concerned and clearly identified: the continued Israeli occupation. Hence, and as numerous international organizations agree, full economic recovery and rehabilitation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the goals driving international assistance — will be possible only when this occupation ends.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I call on the Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Schulz (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), let me express my appreciation for the opportunity to speak on this most important item. We are reminded of its urgency daily as we read the covers of our newspapers and are moved by stories of survival, loss, suffering and hope, from Kashmir to Aceh, to the Sahel and southern Africa, and to the Gulf Coast and beyond.

Indeed, 2005 has shown the dramatic impact that disasters continue to have on lives, livelihoods and hard-won development gains. Climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable development, coupled with inadequate mitigation efforts, suggest that the number of people and assets affected by disasters will continue to rise. Moreover, as demonstrated by Hurricane Katrina, the vulnerable — notably the poor, the sick, the elderly and the marginalized — pay the largest price, in rich and poor countries alike.

Mark Twain once wrote: "Whenever you find that you are on the side of the majority, it is time to reform." In celebrating the sixtieth birthday of the United Nations, Member States have generated an impetus for change, and the United Nations provision of disaster and humanitarian relief is benefiting from such attention.

The International Federation welcomes efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Our eight decades of experience in disaster relief have taught us that effective coordination is the key to success for all. We very much value our close collaboration and coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross in complex emergencies, where armed conflicts and natural disasters combine their destructive forces. No single organization can tackle the increasing challenges posed by disasters. We

must first and foremost work together for the benefit of all.

The Federation also welcomes the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief of the United Nations as a trusted partner of the United Nations system. While our humanitarian principles prompt us to work independently and with the utmost neutrality, we value our cooperation with United Nations Member States and recognize that coordination with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes adds to our effectiveness.

At the national level, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are recognized under the law as auxiliaries to their Governments. Internationally, the International Federation collaborates with United Nations bodies on activities of joint interest. Our coordination with the United Nations at Headquarters and at the field level is further enabled by our relationship with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and by our standing invitation from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. A few examples of our collaboration can be found in Southern Africa and the Sahel, where we distribute food with the World Food Programme; in the Caribbean and Central America, where we prepare annually for the hurricane season through joint contingency planning; in tsunami-affected countries, where we work with the United Nations Development Programme to elaborate coherent disaster management plans; and at Headquarters, where we are active members of the Global Consortium on Tsunami Recovery.

Reform provides many opportunities. The Federation welcomes the decisions set forth in the outcome document of the 2005 world summit, and supports efforts to ensure greater predictability of humanitarian action, funding and access. We would like to provide just a few comments thereupon, while also noting our support for the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, and our hope to continue playing a constructive role in this forum. The cluster approach, which aims to improve the predictability of humanitarian action by organizing coordination on a sectoral basis, is being utilized for the first time in response to the South Asia earthquake. So far, it appears that the new approach has helped to identify common challenges and sectoral gaps and has focused relief on meeting humanitarian needs — and not on the work of any one agency alone.

At the same time, however, the cluster approach may have made a holistic response to disasters more difficult — and possibly even detracted attention from other disasters, such as the devastation caused by Hurricane Stan in Central America. We believe that those mixed results will need to be assessed when the critical emergency phase is over. The Federation also welcomes efforts to strengthen coordination of relief provided by the United Nations at the field level, by strengthening the roles of the humanitarian and resident coordinators. While the Federation operates in an independent manner, it coordinates its work closely with the United Nations and specifically with the humanitarian coordinator.

Most important, however, the Federation supports efforts by countries to strengthen their own capacities to prepare for and respond rapidly to natural disasters and to mitigate their impact. That is not only at the centre of our work as auxiliaries to those Governments and at the heart of our philosophy to mobilize the power of humanity, it is also based on recognition that improved national and local capacities enable coordination of national and international humanitarian actors alike. The development of regional structures, such as the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit and the regional disaster response team have proven equally successful in helping us respond to the hurricanes in Central America and to the South Asia earthquake.

The Federation welcomes United Nations efforts to improve the predictability of humanitarian funding, including the creation of a Central Emergency Response Fund. The Federation's own fund, called the Disaster Response Emergency Fund, helps us to immediately deploy resources to respond to disasters, even before donors assess their ability to pledge any support. The Federation hopes that the Central Emergency Response Fund will bring additional resources, and not cause the reallocation of funds from other important programme areas. We also hope the Fund will provide particular support for neglected and sudden-onset emergencies, and equally for neglected — but most essential — programming, such as disaster preparedness.

Paradoxically, there is a continued lack of adequate funding for preparedness. It continues to be easier to mobilize support for post-disaster responses than for preparedness and mitigation activities that could avoid the loss of life and the destruction of vital

assets. Disaster preparedness has, for a long time, been a core activity of the Federation, and as such, we very much welcome the United Nations focus on developing a culture of prevention.

We believe that strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief must be done holistically, as is disaster management itself. That means that coordination must be strengthened during all phases, from response, to recovery, to preparedness, and on to development. As we have stressed before, preparedness and a culture of prevention are keys to effective relief. Coordination structures must therefore be set up before a disaster occurs, and also be formed to specifically build disaster preparedness and early warning systems.

Through their network of volunteers, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies participate in the development of multihazard early warning systems. These are not slumbering systems; they encompass the ensemble of activities that strengthen the resilience of communities. Volunteers translate warning signals into a suitable language for wide dissemination and community response. Because effective humanitarian and disaster relief depends equally on sustainable development, coordination should span the medium- and long-term phase as well.

The Federation actively cooperates with the United Nations on progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Partnerships with the World Health Organization to address measles and malaria in Africa and with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to reduce stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS are good examples of this.

The Federation also sustains recovery efforts during the long-term when needed, as evidenced by the ongoing work of the Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme, 19 years after the disaster. The Federation has maintained its coordination with the United Nations throughout this time, and is a prominent member of two United Nations initiatives, the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and Cooperation for Rehabilitation of living conditions in Chernobyl-affected areas in Belarus, which seek to promote sustainable development of regions affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The Federation very much welcomes and looks forward to adoption of draft resolution A/60/L.19, on Chernobyl.

We believe that to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief, coordination must be inclusive of a myriad of actors. Naturally, national authorities lead that coordination effort with the possible support of the United Nations system and other international organizations. Of almost importance, however, is for coordination to include affected communities, capturing their roles as first responders and capitalizing on their resilience.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with their expertise in disaster response, extensive reach into vulnerable communities, and auxiliary relationships with Governments, are ideal partners for Governments to that end. Early engagement with national societies at the national and local levels, as well as ongoing support at the community level on a wide range of activities, from reducing greenhouse gases to planning for evacuations, can greatly improve collaboration and results during the relief effort.

To conclude, opportunities for positive change are within reach. As a partner and in the name of our shared beneficiaries, the Federation supports efforts to strengthen the coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief. Indeed, we consider that to be one of the Assembly's most important priorities. Our staff and volunteers remind us daily — as does the President of this Assembly — that success is measured in our actions, and notably in our ability to alleviate human suffering. Mindful of the very realities outside of this Hall, we thus urge Member States to give consideration to the wide-ranging impact of such reform.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the Observer of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Shafer (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): I should like to express my gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for his good work in directing the deliberations of the present session.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta has more than 80,000 humanitarian volunteers who carry out an ever-growing number of life-saving and livelihood-restoring programmes around the world. Our volunteers are motivated by one goal, powerful in its

simplicity: to alleviate human suffering. The obstacles to the successful achievement of that mission are numerous. Therefore, the Order of Malta works actively, in partnership with United Nations agencies, States and local and international non-governmental organizations, to further strengthen a coordinated response to those challenges.

Humanitarian aid workers throughout the world are often the first to respond to crises in the most unsafe areas and the last to remain long after financial support has ebbed. It is that very dedication and tenacity that makes them uniquely vulnerable to acts of violence and persecution.

That regrettable fact is conveyed in the 2005 report of the Secretary-General on safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel (*A/60/223*), which reports an increase in the number of security incidents involving United Nations staff. The most significant dangers to personnel continue to be physical attacks, threats, robbery and theft.

These numbers are more than just statistics to the courageous field personnel of our Order. In early August of this year, Mohammed Idrees Sadiq and Emal Abdul Samad — two local staff members of the Order — were killed in an ambush in south-eastern Afghanistan. The two men had been working to support the return and reintegration of refugees, the building of local income-generating measures and the efficient development of infrastructures as part of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

As an active partner in a number of United Nations peacekeeping operations, the Order of Malta is deeply concerned for the protection of all humanitarian personnel. Allow me to observe that adequate measures for the protection of all humanitarian personnel could be included in the Security Council's mandates. We must neutralize the threats facing humanitarian personnel so that they can continue to actively improve the lives of those in distress.

In the wake of both man-made and natural disasters, it is imperative not only that humanitarian assistance provide immediate relief to victims, but also that comprehensive relief systems be developed to carry out tasks including mitigation, prevention and reconstruction. The Order is convinced of that fact and has demonstrated its ability to make the transition from immediate relief to long-term development in many contexts, not least the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in December 2004. The Order had personnel on the ground in the first days following the disaster, working cooperatively with other organizations and the local communities to provide medical care, water and vital goods for survivors in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia.

When the need for emergency relief subsides, organizations with the necessary capacity can make a seamless transition to reconstruction and development. In affected countries, the Order buys goods locally to limit transportation costs and strengthen the local economy, providing a sustained impetus towards self-help. Projects with timetables of progress stretching from three to five years in the future are planned and carried out in close consultation with national authorities, ensuring the Order's lasting and meaningful assistance.

Before concluding these remarks, I should like to say a few words about the Order's humanitarian activities to provide assistance to the Palestinian people. The Order of Malta has operated the Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem-Palestine for 15 years. The hospital has just celebrated its thirty thousandth healthy delivery, despite having been besieged and damaged as a consequence of the violence in the area. The Order remains committed to the development of a sustainable health system for the Palestinian people.

I should like to assure the Assembly that the Order is responding daily to the challenges presented by humanitarian work. We will continue to follow closely the leadership and initiatives of the United Nations.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Ms. Petitpierre (International Committee of the Red Cross): It is a great pleasure to address the community of nations on this topic, which is both timely and of great importance. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is fully committed to humanitarian coordination. It strives to tie its activities to the real needs of people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, but it certainly cannot meet all such needs, and it does not claim to do so. United Nations agencies are among the most important partners in that endeavour.

I would like to stress three elements related to humanitarian coordination: first, the effort to improve humanitarian coordination through reform of the United Nations humanitarian system; secondly, the need to meet the humanitarian needs of internally displaced people; and thirdly, situations of transition.

The ICRC welcomes the United Nations process of reforming the humanitarian system. Any such process will ultimately lead to more effective and more reliable humanitarian response where it counts most: in the field, among people affected by disaster or conflict. That is true of the United Nations humanitarian system, and it is true of all humanitarian networks. The ICRC will continue to participate in the process — notably as a standing invitee of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and in situations of armed conflict and internal strife — in its role as lead agency for relief operations involving the other component of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.

We are willing to play an active role in efforts to improve complementarity and interoperability among the United Nations system, the Red Cross and Red Crescent network and the community of non-governmental organizations. That could be done, for example, by developing common criteria for assessing needs and measuring impact, by establishing clear arrangements among humanitarian organizations regarding the geographic and thematic division of roles, and undertaking measures to facilitate cooperation among the United Nations Joint Logistics Centre, the ICRC and other logistics centres.

We cooperate with the United Nations humanitarian system, to the extent that such cooperation is compatible with our responsibility, so that we can always act as a neutral and independent intermediary and carry out our strictly and exclusively humanitarian activities. For that reason, the ICRC does not take part in United Nations integrated missions. It must remain in a position to respond to the most immediate needs at the onset of a crisis and to maintain its autonomous operational capability to intervene anywhere within 48 hours of the outbreak of an emergency.

The ICRC firmly believes in complementarity among humanitarian organizations. But it also believes in a pluralistic approach whereby various agencies perform various roles according to their respective comparative advantages. The ICRC's specific comparative advantages are its neutral and independent approach, its operational capacities in the field and its proximity to people in need. While genuinely engaging in dialogue with humanitarian agencies, the ICRC will also preserve its confidential bilateral dialogue with State and non-State actors.

The fate of internally displaced persons is one of the main topics addressed through this reform process. I would like to emphasize that internally displaced persons are protected by international humanitarian law. Those who are living in situations of armed conflict are primarily civilians, and as such are protected by international humanitarian law, which provides for civilian immunity from attack and abuse and also sets forth the explicit right of civilians to receive the assistance essential to their survival.

The needs of internally displaced persons are very diverse. The ICRC is fully aware that responding to that wide range of needs demands the commitment of many bodies and organizations. Again, close coordination with other agencies is the best — indeed, the only — way to meet the needs of all those who have been made to flee their homes and forced to settle, temporarily, in makeshift dwellings, eagerly awaiting their return home.

We are, of course, aware that, unfortunately, the term "temporarily" can mean anything, from a few days or months to years, or even decades. Such drawn-out situations are all-too frequent, and situations of transition today are the rule, rather than the exception.

This brings me to my third point. Transition is a particularly sensitive phase characterized by a high level of uncertainty as to how a situation is going to develop – whether there will be lasting peace or new conflict. It may therefore be necessary to extend relief operations beyond the immediate post-war situation to ensure that there is no gap between the phasing out of humanitarian action and the phasing in of development programmes. Development agencies may have to delay their activities for security reasons or because financial resources have not yet been committed or cannot be disbursed.

It is the ICRC's hope that the planned Peacebuilding Commission will be able to remedy that situation and find lasting solutions, allowing communities that have suffered from the scourge of war to recover in dignity and look to the future with confidence.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of this momentum, which comes almost 15 years after the fundamental resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. This year has witnessed many initiatives, from different sources, to improve the humanitarian system. The ICRC sees this debate as essential, and will continue to play its part in it. Profoundly convinced of the continuing necessity to bring a better humanitarian response to those in need, we will do our utmost to pursue and deepen our privileged relationship with United Nations agencies. At the same time, we will constantly ensure that we preserve our own identity, for the good of the victims whom we all strive to help.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/4 of 16 October 1992, I call on the Observer for the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. Dall'Oglio (International Organization for Migration): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) welcomes the opportunity to take the floor today on the very important topic of the effective coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts. As an active member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the IOM regards the IASC as the principal mechanism for the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance and as a model of partnership among United Nations humanitarian agencies, other intergovernmental bodies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and the non-governmental organization community.

Another key coordination element of the humanitarian community is the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). The IOM recognizes the CAP as a strategic planning and programming process, not just a resource mobilization tool. We have gradually expanded our participation in that vital process. Final preparations are currently ongoing for the global launch in 2006, and we expect to take part in seven appeals out of a total of 12 CAPs.

The President returned to the Chair.

Strengthening coordination among different humanitarian agencies requires us to take into account the changing nature of various emergencies and the evolution of the participating agencies themselves. Reform and innovative approaches are periodically needed. The IASC has recently endorsed a cluster approach in nine key areas of intervention as a means to achieve stronger leadership, support and accountability. These, in turn, are expected to improve the predictability, timeliness and effectiveness of the humanitarian response to crisis. The cluster approach was field tested for the first time during the inter-agency response to the devastating earthquake in South Asia, most notably in Pakistan. In responding to that emergency, IOM has been tasked with the role of cluster leader in the area of emergency shelter and is working in active cooperation with other agencies to provide tents and other shelter options through Operation Winter Race. We believe that that coordination effort is bringing the first positive results, and we are committed to its effectiveness.

Clearly, such efforts require timely and predictable funding if they are to succeed. In this connection, IOM welcomes the initiative being taken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to propose an upgraded Central Emergency Revolving Fund. Facilitated and streamlined access, as well as the introduction of a grant facility, are important improvements which will help to front-load urgently needed funds and improve the capacity for quick response.

The humanitarian community has been confronted in the past year with natural disasters of unusual — if not unprecedented — magnitude and frequency, epitomized by the Asian tsunami and, more recently, by the earthquake in South Asia. The growing human, social and financial impact of natural catastrophes has been identified as a clear and — at least in the short term — irreversible trend, which can be addressed only by reinforcing preparedness and disaster-mitigation measures, as clearly spelled out in the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The IOM's humanitarian intervention in response to natural disasters encompasses assistance to populations displaced by such events. Studies conducted some years ago indicate that 25 million people had been forced to migrate owing to environmental disasters. Such disasters can trigger irregular migration as people are suddenly uprooted from their homes and forced to flee, either internally or to neighbouring countries, thus increasing the impact of such movements. People fleeing natural disasters are often separated from their families and have a high risk of contracting diseases owing to the breakdown of

social structures, including loss of access to health care. Furthermore, let us not forget that in the aftermath of such events the potential for trafficking in separated or orphaned children may increase.

For all those reasons, we believe that such migration movements not only deserve a prompt, coordinated response in the short and medium term, but that that they also must be fully taken into account within the Hyogo Framework.

In addition to numerous devastating natural disasters, humanitarian agencies have continued to address a number of man-made crises. IOM has high expectations as to the decision taken at the recent world summit to create a Peacebuilding Commission aimed at enhancing the international community's capacity to support war-torn societies, so as to avoid a relapse into conflict and to create conditions for sustainable peace. We believe that the activities of the Peacebuilding Commission will have strong implications for humanitarian agencies active in post-conflict scenarios, and we look forward to establishing an open and fruitful cooperation with the Commission.

Allow me to conclude my remarks by reaffirming the value that IOM attaches to its participation in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and our support for the ongoing collaborative efforts, including those I mentioned earlier, made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to promote a shared environment for the attainment of key humanitarian policies and goals.

Finally, we wish to take this opportunity to renew to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland and to his team at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on behalf of IOM's Director General, our sincere appreciation for the professionalism, dedication and inclusiveness they have demonstrated in their collaboration with our organization.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/195 of 17 December 1999, I now call on the Observer for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Mr. Bhagwat-Singh (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources): The item under consideration before the General Assembly today is of great relevance and importance. I wish to commend the Secretariat for having prepared such comprehensive reports on the subject under review.

The world has witnessed natural disasters of growing magnitude over the past few years, which have resulted in heavy losses of life and serious damage to the environment and to biodiversity, and subsequent long-term damage to the affected areas.

The response by Governments, United Nations bodies and the public sector to all those disasters has been prompt, appropriate and very generous. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), by nature of its composition, has played a significant role in early relief and rehabilitation and in recommendations for long-term environmental management. IUCN has a proven ability to mobilize its members — 82 Governments and more than 100 non-governmental organizations, as well as hundreds of practitioners and scientists, for a common cause. It also has the infrastructure, through regional, national and project offices in 62 countries, to coordinate national and cross-regional activities.

Immediately following the tsunami disaster, IUCN, with its regional staff, collaborated with all of the organizations involved in the immediate relief, rehabilitation and recovery efforts. We have had a series of meetings with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery and have submitted to him our proposals regarding the restoration of ecosystems in the Indian Ocean. We have stressed in particular the importance of the mangrove system in buttressing coastal areas against environmental degradation. In South Asia, mangroves, coastal forests and wetlands have declined in both surface area and in terms of their composition, and there is ample evidence that fish stocks and other endangered marine species are also declining or fast disappearing.

IUCN has a large presence in South Asia, and our staff in the region was quick to respond to the destruction caused by the recent earthquake. Apart from the enormous and tragic loss of life, there has been great damage to the environment, particularly to forests. Forest products are critical to the survival of disaster victims in the coming winter, and the need for shelter, firewood and wood for reconstruction has resulted in a new threat to the surviving forests. It is essential that measures be taken to manage the forests in a sustainable manner, for the benefit both of the earthquake-affected people and for future generations.

IUCN will be transmitting a comprehensive version of this statement electronically to all Missions. Meanwhile, we wish to assure delegates of IUCN's continued collaboration and involvement in the support for medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts in order to alleviate the effects of future natural disasters.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 73 and its sub-items (a), (c) and (d).

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolutions A/60/L.18 to A/60/L.20.

Before we proceed further, I should like to consult the Assembly with a view to considering draft resolutions A/60/L.19 and A/60/L.20 at this meeting. In that connection, since the two draft resolutions were circulated only earlier today, it would be necessary to waive the relevant provision of rule 78 of the rules of procedure.

The relevant provision of rule 78 reads as follows:

> "As a general rule, no proposal shall be discussed or put to the vote at any meeting of the General Assembly unless copies of it have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the meeting."

Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Assembly agrees with this proposal.

It was so decided.

The President: In connection with draft resolution A/60/L.18, I should like to give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru (Chief, General Assembly Affairs Branch): I should like to inform representatives that, in connection with draft resolution A/60/L.18, I wish to place on record the following statement of financial implications on behalf of the Secretary-General.

By operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly

> "Requests the Secretary-General to appoint a special envoy in order to, inter alia, sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts".

The resources that would be required in connection with the appointment of the special envoy would be financed exclusively from extrabudgetary resources. Therefore, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/60/L.18, there would be no financial implications for the regular budget.

I should like to inform members that the title of draft resolution A/60/L.18 on the reissued version that was distributed in the General Assembly Hall earlier this afternoon should read: "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the South Asian earthquake disaster — Pakistan". The title will be reflected in the final version of the draft resolution.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolutions A/60/L.18, A/60/L.19 and A/60/L.20.

Draft resolution A/60/L.18 is entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the South Asian earthquake disaster — Pakistan". There is a list of additional sponsors, which I will read out: Andorra, Angola, the Bahamas, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Guyana, Iraq, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malta, the Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nepal, Serbia and Montenegro, South Africa, Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.18?

Draft resolution A/60/L.18 was adopted (resolution 60/13).

The President: We now turn to draft resolution A/60/L.19, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". Additional sponsors are the following: Angola, Bangladesh, Iceland, India, Malta, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia and Spain.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.19?

Draft resolution A/60/L.19 was adopted (resolution 60/14).

The President: We now turn to draft resolution A/60/L.20, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the

aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster". There is a long list of additional sponsors: Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belgium, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Djibouti, Estonia, France, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, India, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Poland, Qatar, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Tuvalu, Ukraine, the United States of America and Zambia.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.20?

Draft resolution A/60/L.20 was adopted (resolution 60/15).

The President: Before calling on representatives who have requested to speak in exercise of the right of reply, I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Oron (Israel): As I listened to the statement of my Palestinian colleague, I realized to my regret that I was hearing the same recording that I have heard so many times in the past. Unlike the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories, which has dramatically changed during recent years, my colleague's statement employed the same rhetoric, omissions, factual inaccuracies and crude generalizations.

Although the Palestinian observer may want the Assembly to believe otherwise, the situation has changed over the past years. Despite violence and despair during the intifada, there was a peace process prior to it, during which the two sides signed international agreements and the Palestinian Authority was created. Less than a year ago, new hope was created when Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Mahmoud Abbas met in Sharm el-Sheikh and when both expressed a commitment to a peaceful settlement according to the road map.

This past summer, Prime Minister Sharon took a bold and courageous move by disengaging all troops and civilians from all of the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank. Furthermore, constructive negotiations are currently taking place over transferring control of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. What has not changed, however, is the unwillingness of the Palestinian Authority to confront terrorism and fulfil its first obligation under the road map, to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and collect arms.

Palestinian terrorists continue to kill Israeli civilians and fire Qassam rockets onto Israeli towns and cities. There have been more than 26,000 terrorist attacks perpetrated against Israeli targets during the past five years. There should be no doubt about the impetus for those attacks. They were carried out with the sole intention to murder, targeting as many children, women and men as possible.

Neither side has a monopoly on suffering; nor can either side fail to assume their commitments. I invite my Palestinian colleagues to discontinue unhelpful rhetoric and utilize the current momentum for peace. Israel will further elaborate on that subject when the General Assembly takes action on the relevant draft resolution.

The President: I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Hijazi (Palestine): It is easy to use red-herring arguments, as the Israeli representative just did, in order to divert attention from the indisputable information presented about the grave violations of international law that we referred to earlier in our statement. The fact remains that until and unless Israel halts its military campaign against the Palestinian people, Israel will be held responsible for its practices.

Furthermore, the systematic destruction of the Palestinian people's infrastructure and all their development projects, as well as the deprivation of their sovereignty over their land and resources, are the direct result of a clear policy adopted by the State of Israel, the occupying Power.

The Israeli representative referred to the withdrawal from Gaza. The exit, though significant in that it set a precedent, was 38 years too late and was done in a manner that left the Gaza Strip and its 1.3 million inhabitants prisoners, denied access to the rest of the world and to the other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore, I would like to

remind the Israeli representative of a point that her Government often conveniently omits from the discussion on the Gaza Strip exit, and that is that Israeli occupation forces continue to maintain effective control over the Gaza Strip by land, sea and air.

The Gaza Strip was left in ruins and is now experiencing the effects of never-before-used Israeli weapons, including artillery rounds. Gaza residents have been violently shaken out of their sleep, as their windows shatter from the effects of repeated sonic booms over their skies at intensities never experienced before. That imprisoned population is now also held hostage and terrorized.

Numbers and figures in this conflict are a powerful identifier of the aggressor and the aggressed-upon. It is interesting that the Israeli delegate chose to bring up numbers and figures, since she must know that her occupying forces have, over the past four years alone, killed more than 4,000 Palestinians, including 682 children. The delegate, no doubt, also knows better than all of us the exact figure, totalling into the tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition, artillery and rockets weighing up to 1,000 kilos, that the Israeli occupation forces have used against Palestinian population centres. We invite her to share that figure with us.

It is only when Israel, the occupying Power, puts an end to its occupation, and with that, an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people for 38 years now, that the international assistance would be fruitful and attain its desired and noble goal.

The President: In the course of today's debate, speakers referred to the unprecedented number and scale of disasters during this past year, and we have also heard the views of Member States on the follow-up to the Chernobyl disaster. I have taken note of the views of delegations for a special meeting of the General Assembly in that regard.

I am glad that speakers have underlined the importance of humanitarian principles, as enshrined in resolution 46/182, as well as in the world summit outcome document. I also note the praise for the selfless work undertaken by the humanitarian workers around the world, under difficult conditions, and especially the appeal for their free and unhindered access to areas struck by disaster and devastation.

The envisaged transformation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund was generally welcomed during this debate. At the same time, the view was expressed that it is also important to consider resources from actors not traditionally considered to be humanitarian actors, such as the private sector and civil society. The necessity of the predictability of humanitarian aid and assistance was stressed, together with the importance of follow-up to the pledges made at donor conferences and better monitoring of humanitarian assistance by way of an institutionalized mechanism. A similar mechanism has also been requested in other fields of development.

As President of the General Assembly and former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, I very much appreciate the fact that most speakers expressed appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland for his important work and the work of his staff, and I support the expressed need for the further strengthening of capacity-building within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In the same vein, more needs to be done to strengthen the system-wide coherence and coordination of United Nations efforts in the humanitarian field. Here, countries' expertise and the involvement of regional organizations are of great significance.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that although we have finished today's debate, we are not closing this very important item. I would like to recall the important work to which I referred earlier — aimed at the security and safety of humanitarian personnel — that is still going on in the Second and Sixth Committees and elsewhere in the United Nations system. This debate has, in my view, reminded us of the importance of the humanitarian imperative. It has also reminded us that that imperative requires action: action in the field to save and improve the lives of millions of vulnerable fellow human beings.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 73?

It was so decided.

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 73 and its sub-items (a) and (d).

Agenda item 42 (*continued*)

Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

Draft resolution (A/60/L.17)

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held the debate on agenda item 42, jointly with agenda item 43, at its 35th and 36th plenary meetings, on 20 October.

I give the floor to the representative of Mongolia to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.17.

Ms. Enkhtsetseg (Mongolia): I have the distinct honour to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.17, entitled "Eight hundred years of Mongolian statehood", on behalf of the sponsors listed in the document: Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malawi, Monaco, Morocco, the Philippines, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkey, the United States of America and my own country, Mongolia. In addition, I am pleased to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have joined the list of sponsors: Australia, Canada, Iceland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Oman, Romania, Slovenia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkmenistan.

Civilizational achievements constitute the collective heritage of mankind. Embracing such action and working to achieve an objective understanding of all civilizations are of special significance for enhancing constructive interaction and cooperative engagement among all civilizations. Yet a rich and diverse civilization created by nomadic peoples across the globe — most notably on the vast expanses of the Euro-Asian steppe — as so far received litt!e attention within the overall framework of the global agenda aimed at dialogue among civilizations.

Nomadic civilization has existed mostly in peaceful symbiosis with sedentary societies and has played an important role in the development of extensive trade networks and in the creation of large administrative cultural, religious and commercial centres. Studies indicate that the nomadic peoples of Arabic, Finnish, Mongolic, Turkic and other origins have significantly influenced societies throughout the world. Their mobility has been instrumental in making possible the free flow of ideas across regions, thus contributing to the shape of the modern world.

Indeed, nomadic civilization has served for thousands of years as a bridge between world civilizations. The culture of living in harmony with nature, which is inherent in nomadic civilization, allows the preservation of the delicate ecological balance of natural habitats. This ability of nomads to adapt to nature's whims has a heightened validity today against the backdrop of current environmental threats and challenges.

Mongolia is a nomadic State. My nation's traditions, values and culture, as well as its very mentality and self-identity, stem from its nomadic roots. Mongolia is also an ancient country; it will celebrate the eight hundredth anniversary of its statehood next year. As my President said from this rostrum at the September summit, "Anniversaries provoke recollections over the past and projections for the future" (*A/60/PV.5, p. 27*). Therefore, the eight hundredth anniversary provides us with an opportunity not only to look back at the legacies of our forefathers, but also to take up more closely the study of nomadic civilization.

Accordingly, the draft resolution now before the Assembly has two main themes that are intricately intertwined and mutually reinforcing. First, it seeks to reinforce the concept of dialogue among civilizations, bringing the role and contribution of nomadic civilization into the global agenda. It also reaffirms the importance of preserving and developing the centuries-old traditions and culture of nomadic peoples in modern societies. In addition, it seeks to encourage renewed interest in studying various aspects of nomadic civilization on the part of relevant international organizations, civil society and academia, thus contributing to mutual understanding among civilizations and cultures.

The draft resolution also acknowledges the centuries-old statehood of Mongolia, welcomes the efforts of my Government to celebrate its eight hundredth anniversary next year and invites Member States, the United Nations, other organizations, academia and civil society to take part actively in the events to be organized in celebration of this anniversary.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to express its wholehearted gratitude and appreciation to all our

fellow sponsors for their valuable support and solidarity. On their behalf, we express our confidence that the draft resolution will command the broadest possible support of the Assembly and that it will be adopted by consensus.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.17, entitled "Eight hundred years of Mongolian statehood".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.17?

Draft resolution A/60/L.17 was adopted (resolution 60/16).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 42?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.